

REFLECTIONS ON FORGIVENESS

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To paraphrase Gautama Buddha, “when we create thoughts of vengeance, blame and anger, two beings are poisoned and the one generating these thoughts eats the poison first.”

Blame is accusing others for our current condition. It is the antithesis of self-responsibility and is, fundamentally, powerless to transform our outer and inner life.

The path of awakening includes *letting go of blaming anybody for anything*. This does NOT mean to absolve or approve of specific actions. We must learn to separate the action from the actor, the doing from the Being.

Mature forgiveness is not a closing of one’s eyes to injustice, misdeeds or potential future danger. Rather it includes entering the highest and deepest within oneself and seeing the same in the other.

Forgiveness can be invited, never forced. To demand forgiveness of our inner life is a form of self-violence. We can create conditions whereby forgiveness is a natural blossoming. Sometimes this means taking care of the inner place that is not ready to forgive.

Memory is a creation based on events. The story we tell ourselves about the events generates their meaning. These stories radically effect our health, happiness and future. Things did not happen exactly the way we recall them. In this sense our ‘story’ is never THE truth. All recollection is from a point of view and even that view is changeable. Our brain keeps reforming memory as cells die and others are reborn. As trite as it is, neurologically it is true: “it is never to late to have a happy childhood”.

A paradoxical corollary: “forgiveness is letting go of all hope for a better past”. How can both of these be true?

All forgiveness is self-forgiveness, for whenever we close our hearts we suffer. We can forgive ourselves for that. **Forgiveness is an act of Love.**

GIVING AND RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness goes in two directions: giving and receiving. In giving forgiveness, we receive the grace that comes from opening our hearts. In receiving forgiveness, we open beyond guilt into love.

Forgiving others does not suggest approval of the behavior. Rather we stop fighting with the truth of life. Holding resentment and blame means holding our opinion or preference above 'what is'. Bowing to the reality of our life- it is as it is, it was as it was- creates a strange alchemy- it was as it had to be. IF we could know all the infinite causes of a given moment, we would see its inevitability. More accurately, before a moment occurs it can become anything, once a moment occurs it had to be that way. How can those both be true?

To receive forgiveness from another and from ourselves requires acknowledgement of the misdeed. To forgive ourselves involves a deep intention to do better in the future. In classic religious terms this means repentance. When we act in ways that are not congruent with our own values, it is very helpful to acknowledge our error. Often a genuine, heartfelt apology helps 'right' the situation. "Sin" originally meant "off the mark". It means we make mistakes.

Forgiveness can be the most challenging enactment of love imaginable. When we are hurt, self-protection arises. We usually either withdraw into our shells or strike out. Neither is very satisfying for very long.

ASKING FOR HELP

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong"
Mahatma Gandhi

True forgiveness is a spiritual deed. It means we become larger than our "story", our history, and we enter the vastness of a larger sense of Self. **Forgiveness is an action, not a feeling.** It is often an extremely difficult enactment of our **freedom to choose** new thoughts, feelings and behaviors. We cannot rely solely on our "hope", there needs to be a strong intention and commitment. We may need to visit the same situation numerous times and it

is possible that one deep visit will be sustaining. We often need help from many sources. Standing “next to” the situation and the feelings, we can ask for help from: 1) our sense of the most True (God, All, universal wisdom, highest and deepest in your cosmology), 2) our truest Self, and 3) the others in the situation. In mysterious ways the intention creates an energy that is transformative.

“I know that I am forgiven, but I don’t know how I know”. Leonard Cohen